

Community gathers for Sklut Hillel Center dedication

By Eric Townsend, staff March 4, 2013

A renovated home near the Academic Village was made possible by gifts from Eric and Lori Sklut P'14 and several generous benefactors.



From left: Elon University President Leo M. Lambert, Lori Sklut, Eric Sklut and Assistant Professor Geoffrey Claussen attach a mezuzah to the entrance to the Sklut Hillel Center

Jewish students, parents, faculty, staff and their friends at the university joined together Sunday to dedicate a new home for **Elon Hillel** [<http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/hillel/>], a member of a worldwide organization that fosters personal connections to Jewish life, learning, and Israel, and to "cultivating commitment to the Jewish people and the world."

Named for Eric and Lori Sklut, parents of a university student and the benefactors who made a lead gift to fund the center through the Levine-Sklut Family Foundation, the Sklut Hillel Center will serve Jewish students studying at Elon this year as well as the countless others who will one day make the campus their home.

The renovated building formerly housed the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, which has since moved to Elon's new Numen Lumen Pavilion.



Eric and Lori Sklut P'14 made a lead gift to help bring the vision for a Hillel center to reality on campus.

"We are overwhelmed with the warmth and cheerfulness this house now exudes," Lori Sklut said as she and Eric addressed the crowd that gathered for the March 3 dedication on the lawn outside the house, which sits at the intersection of Antioch and East College avenues. "The picture of Jewish life at Elon is now complete."

Hillel at Elon offers Shabbat programs, Jewish cultural events, Passover meals, worship opportunities and interfaith events. The Sklut Hillel Center includes a modern kitchen, student lounges, a patio/sukkah, offices, a conference room and business lounge to provide a home-like atmosphere.

"The Sklut Hillel Center assures us that there will always be a place, there will always be a home, for Jewish life on this campus," said Hillel director Nancy Luberoff, who noted that the center complements a growing academic focus on Jewish studies and, in the Greek system, a new Jewish fraternity that has recently colonized at Elon University.



"Beyond your financial commitment, I want to thank you for your vision and leadership," Elon President Leo M. Lambert said the Skluts during the March 3 dedication.

Elon junior Arielle Weil, president of Elon Hillel, explained the role Hillel played in her own spiritual growth. When she first joined Hillel, she knew little about Jewish traditions, she said. That changed as Luberoff shared with Weil reflections about what it means to be Jewish.

"Being Jewish isn't about knowing the traditions," Weil recalled Luberoff telling her. "It's about how you treat people and taking opportunities to improve their lives."

Remarks were also made by Deborah Geiger, director of the Soref Initiative for Emerging Campuses at the Hillel Schusterman International Center in Washington, D.C., and by Jeff Stein, chief of staff and senior advisor to the president, both of whom were instrumental in marshaling resources and creating the vision for what Hillel has become at Elon.

Elon University President Leo M. Lambert thanked the Skluts as well as other donors whose generosity to the university have made it possible to grow a vibrant Jewish life on campus. "Beyond your financial commitment, I want to thank you for your vision and leadership," Lambert said. "Like so many of our wonderful parents, you have stepped up and provided leadership when we needed it, and funds when we needed it, to translate that vision into reality."

The formal program was preceded by the hanging of mezuzahs on doorposts throughout the home. The ceremony ended with a final mezuzah affixed by Eric Sklut and Assistant Professor Geoffrey Claussen to the right column next to the center's main entrance.

The Skluts are active supporters of Jewish life at Elon. They endowed the Lori and Eric Sklut Emerging Scholar in Jewish Studies, a named professorship that Claussen holds, and their son Mason, an Elon junior, serves on Hillel's student board. Lori and Eric Sklut also serve as co-chairs of the Jewish Life Advisory Council with fellow Elon parents Andy and Debbie Cable.

The center will also serve campus groups such as the Elon Academy, a college access program for promising high school students with financial need or no family history of college. Elon Academy students taking sustainable food courses will use the center's kitchen to store and prepare food grown in Elon's Community Garden.

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